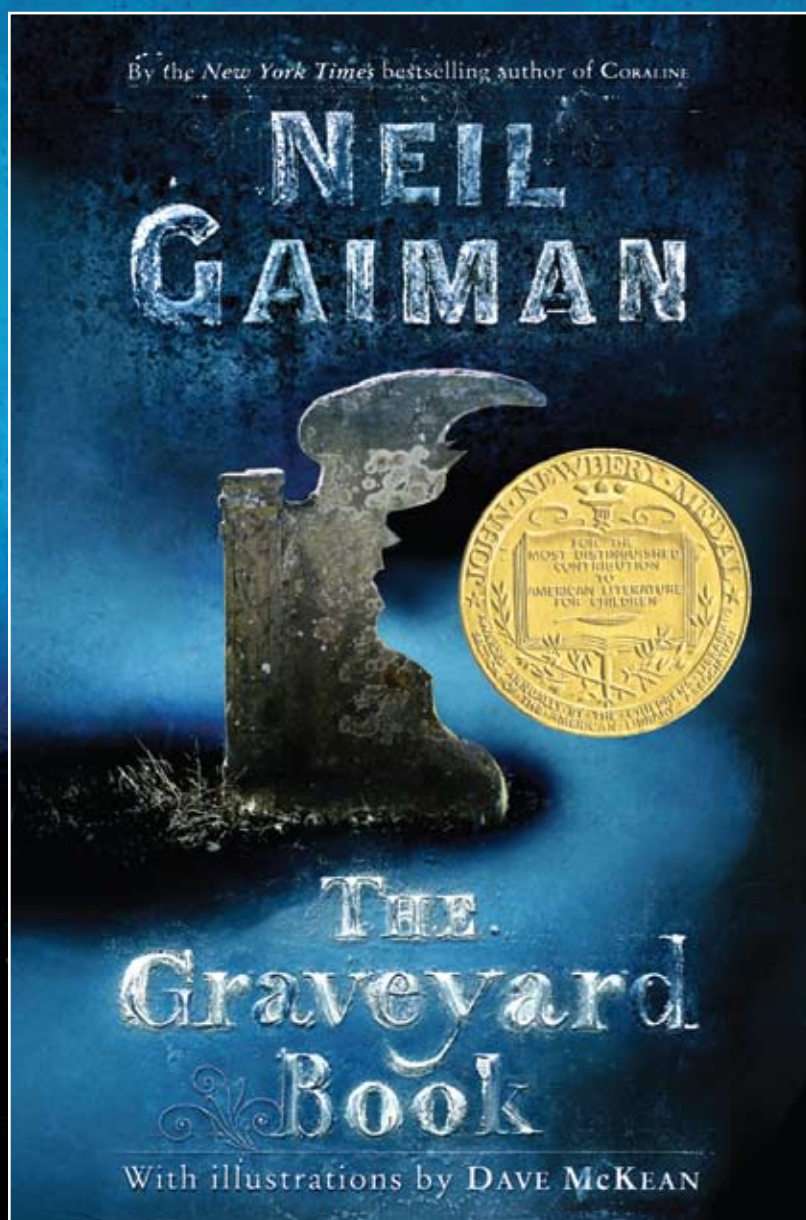


NEIL GAIMAN'S

THE Graveyard Book

Teaching Guide



ABOUT THE BOOK

When his family is murdered one night by the man Jack, an infant boy toddles unnoticed up the street to the graveyard, where he is taken in and raised by its denizens—ghosts, ghouls, vampires, and werewolves. Such an unusual upbringing affords young Nobody Owens (Bod, for short) almost everything he could wish for, but he still longs for human companionship, news of his family's murderer, and life beyond the graveyard. Bod's pursuit of these things increasingly places him in danger, because the man Jack is still looking for him . . . waiting to finish the job he started.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Newbery Medal
Hugo Award
Locus Award
Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Honor Book
ALA Notable Children's Book
ALA Best Book for Young Adults
ALA *Booklist* Editors' Choice
Horn Book Fanfare
Kirkus Reviews Best Children's Book
Time Magazine Top Ten Fiction
Cooperative Children's Book Center Choice
New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
New York Public Library Stuff for the Teen Age
Vermont's Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award

Watch Neil Gaiman read *The Graveyard Book* in its entirety, download *The Graveyard Book* printable poster, and discover other fantastic delights at www.mousecircus.com.

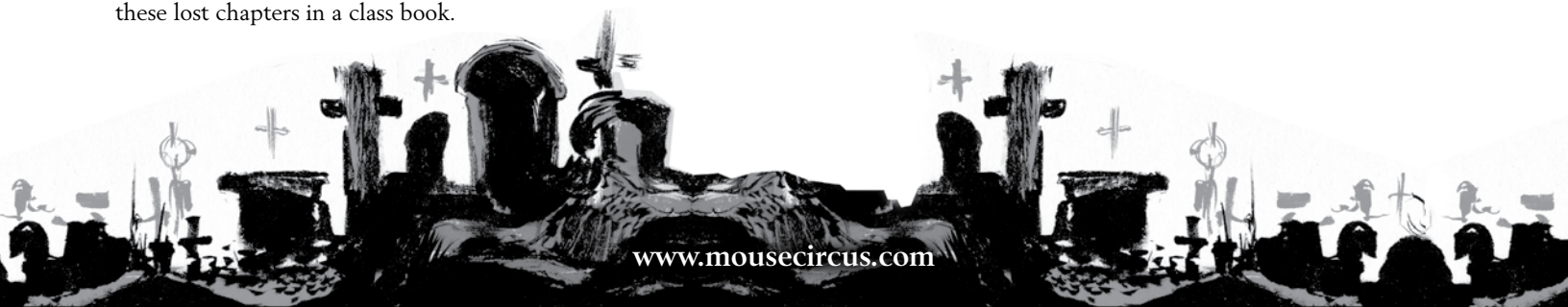
THE GRAVEYARD BOOK TEACHING GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. From the opening lines, Gaiman hooks readers with a distinct narrative voice and a vivid setting. Discuss how both of these elements serve the story.
2. There is a rich tradition of orphans in children's literature as well as a tradition of child-of-destiny themes in fantasy literature. Discuss how Bod fits squarely into both categories.
3. The graveyard is populated with characters we typically think of as evil. How does Gaiman play with this idea, particularly in the characters of Silas, Miss Lupescu, and Eliza Hempstock? What do these characterizations suggest about human nature?
4. Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean are frequent collaborators. How do the illustrations contribute to your reading of *The Graveyard Book*?
5. If you are familiar with Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, discuss how *The Graveyard Book* is reminiscent of Kipling's classic tale. How does a familiarity with *The Jungle Book* enhance the reading of *The Graveyard Book*?
6. At the close of the novel, Mrs. Owens sings about embracing the human experience: "Face your life / Its pain, its pleasure, / Leave no path untaken" (p. 306). How does this theme resonate throughout the novel?
7. "A graveyard is not normally a democracy, and yet death is the great democracy" (p. 29). How is death the great democracy? How does Gaiman explore the relationship between the dead and the living?
8. It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. How does this graveyard come together to raise this particular child? Describe the special mentoring relationships that Bod has with Silas and Miss Lupescu.
9. Boundaries—between the living and the dead, between the graveyard and the world—are an important part of the novel. How does Bod test these boundaries? What are the consequences of Bod's actions?
10. Bod's human interactions are limited to a short-lived friendship with Scarlett and a brief stint at school. Discuss how these experiences change Bod. How do our friendships and associations with others affect us?
11. What do you think of the advice that Bod receives from Nehemiah Trot, the dead poet: "Do not take revenge in the heat of the moment. Instead, wait until the hour is propitious" (p. 233)?
12. How does *The Graveyard Book* compare to Gaiman's first novel for young readers, *Coraline*? Much of *Coraline*'s success can be attributed to its strong and diverse following. What are some of the characteristics of Gaiman's writing that make it appealing to young and old alike?
13. Like much of Gaiman's work, *The Graveyard Book* manages to fuse elements of humor, horror, fantasy, and mystery into a single story. Identify examples of these elements and discuss how they work together. How might the story read differently if one or more of these elements were removed?

CREATIVE WRITING PROMPTS

1. **First Lines.** "There was a hand in the darkness, and it held a knife" (p. 2). From the first sentence of *The Graveyard Book*, Neil Gaiman conveys a sense of danger and menace, compelling readers to turn the page. Ask students to write ten first lines of their own—funny, sad, suspenseful, surprising, or intriguing. Have students share what they have written and discuss how they compare to Gaiman's first lines. Then have each student choose one of his or her opening lines and write a short story following it.
2. **Lost Chapters.** What else might have happened to Bod that did not make it into *The Graveyard Book*? Ask students to write their own episodes about Bod solving a problem. Your students' stories can include both new and familiar characters. Collect these lost chapters in a class book.
3. **Epitaph Poems.** Various dead characters in the novel are introduced with their epitaphs. An epitaph is the inscription found on a tombstone that summarizes and memorializes the deceased. An epitaph poem, therefore, is a very short (and often witty) poem about the deceased. Write epitaph poems for Bod, Silas, Jack, and Miss Lupescu, or for yourself, or for a friend.
4. **Movie Director.** Assign students the job of casting *The Graveyard Book* as a movie. For this persuasive writing assignment, each student is playing the role of the movie director while you, the teacher, are the producer. Have students explain their casting choices in one to two paragraphs. You may want to limit this project to just one character (Silas, for example) so that students can focus on their arguments rather than simply making a list.



THE GRAVEYARD BOOK TEACHING GUIDE

BUILDING VOCABULARY

For each of the following vocabulary words, small groups of students need two cards, one showing the word and the other showing the definition. Cards are laid down on a flat surface facing up so that each word and its definition are visible. Students take turns matching words to definitions.

Chapters 1–3

• anorak
• barrow
• carrion
• diffuse
• drear
• expostulate
• gorse
• guttural
• mausoleum
• obelisk
• tendril
• ululation
• unflappable
• unperturbed

Chapters 4–6

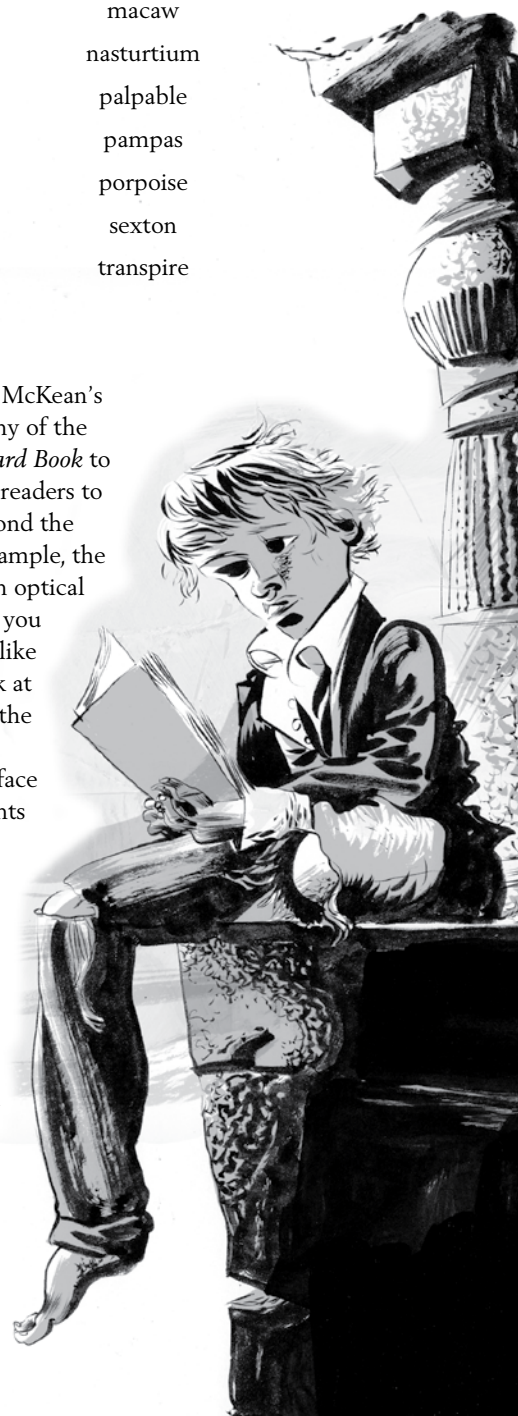
• abate
• belfry
• enterprise
• gingerly
• inquisitive
• macabre
• municipal
• obstinate
• pearlescent
• prelude
• reprehensible
• rubbish
• skirling
• translucent

Chapters 7–8

• affable
• antagonize
• brogue
• consternation
• doggerel
• gargantuan
• glacier
• macaw
• nasturtium
• palpable
• pampas
• porpoise
• sexton
• transpire

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Gravestone Rubbing.** Scarlett first meets Mr. Frost in the graveyard when he is rubbing gravestones, a hobby that many people enjoy. As a class, visit a cemetery with paper and crayons and have students rub some gravestones of their own. Encourage students to act like detectives to see what they can infer about the dead based on their gravestones.
- Book Trailer.** The short previews of coming attractions (known as trailers in the movie industry) are a great way to entice an audience. Have small groups of students design trailers for *The Graveyard Book*, incorporating a script, costumes, props, sound effects, software applications (such as PowerPoint), and a video camera. For inspiration, have students check out Neil Gaiman's trailer for *The Graveyard Book* at www.mousecircus.com.
- Monster Trivia.** Have pairs of students research some of the monsters featured in the book, such as werewolves, witches, vampires, ghosts, and ghouls. Then have partners write monster trivia questions to share with the rest of the class. Some questions should be based on this book, while others may draw from popular culture in general.
- Supernatural Powers.** Bod has several supernatural powers: the Slide, the Fade, and the Dreamwalk. Ask each student to invent a fourth supernatural power for Bod, draw a picture of him, and label his four special abilities with captions.
- Picture Perfect.** Dave McKean's illustrations bring many of the scenes in *The Graveyard Book* to life, while also urging readers to explore the story beyond the written word. (For example, the jacket illustration is an optical illusion: While at first you only see the gargoyle-like gravestone, if you look at the negative space to the right, you see Bod's profile, the upturned face of a boy.) Have students choose their favorite scene from the novel and illustrate it. Students may want to try to evoke different moods—scary, creepy, funny, or mysterious—until they find the one that works best.



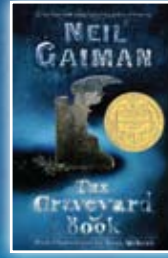
NEIL GAIMAN'S Books for Young Readers



"One of the most frightening books ever written."
—*New York Times Book Review*



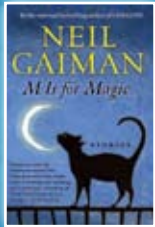
★ "A virtuoso adaptation."
—*ALA Booklist* (starred review)



"Gaiman at the top of his form."
—*New York Times Book Review*



★ "[A] mind-stretching ride."
—*VOYA* (starred review)



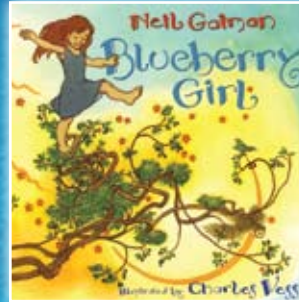
"Inventive, scary, thrilling, and finally affirmative."
—*Washington Post*



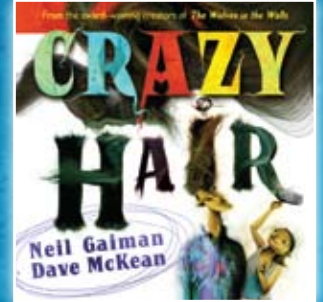
"More proof that there isn't much Gaiman can't write well."
—*ALA Booklist*



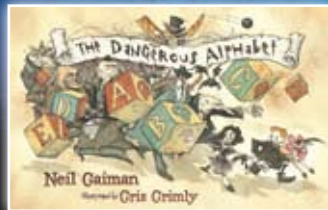
★ "A deftly written fantasy adventure tale."
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)



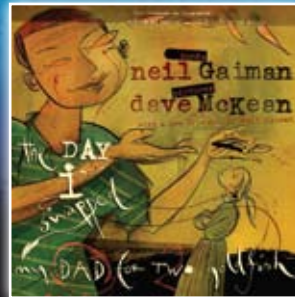
"A rich and beautiful prayer for a girl."
—*Kirkus Reviews*



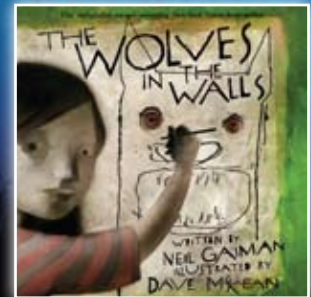
"Each page is a veritable feast for the eyes."
—*ALA Booklist*



"An acrid, gothic confection."
—*ALA Booklist*



"An energetic, eye-catching volume."
—*Publishers Weekly*



★ "Rich in language and wordplay."
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)



Philippe Matsas

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Neil Gaiman is the author of nationally bestselling children's books, graphic novels, and novels and story collections for adults. He has also written the scripts for movies, including *MirrorMask* and *Beowulf*. Among his many awards are the Newbery Medal, the World Fantasy Award, the Hugo Award, the Nebula Award, and the Bram Stoker Award. You can visit him online at www.mousecircus.com.

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Guide prepared by Jonathan Hunt, library media teacher, Modesto, California.